



Office of
National Preparedness

Smart Practices Spotlight

Educating the Media About Emergency Operations Volusia County, Florida

Summary: *In an effort to help the media better understand emergency operations, the Volusia County Emergency Management Division and the Community Information Division held a mock hurricane exercise that placed local journalists in emergency management roles. The exercise allowed members of the news media to experience first-hand some of the challenges that face emergency personnel during a major emergency or disaster and helped increase their understanding of emergency preparations and response operations.*

The State of Florida is no stranger to hurricane response and recovery operations. Sometimes, however, important information that citizens need to know can get muddled and neither the news media nor the community understand clearly the emergency response and recovery process. Recently, the Volusia County Emergency Management Division along with the county's Community Information Division put together an activity to address that problem: They coordinated an exercise involving the news media as players in the emergency response to a simulated hurricane.

"We tried to create an exercise similar to the way we would train our emergency management personnel," said David Byron, director of the Community Information Division. The simulation was designed to familiarize local journalists with the functions of the Volusia County Emergency Operations Center and the issues faced by elected officials during such an event.

Members of the news media were given roles normally filled by emergency management personnel during a real time event. Over forty competing members of the media found themselves working together to solve disaster-related response problems. Although the county had educated and informed journalists about the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) and its functions through tours and presentations, the exercise provided a hands-on, interactive experience that proved to be highly successful.

Because of the overwhelming success of the project and the positive reaction of news media representatives and agencies involved, Volusia County plans to organize the simulation again at the beginning of the 2003 hurricane season. By actively involving the media in such activities, Volusia County's Smart Practice helped the media understand the issues faced by emergency managers and, therefore, will assist them in reporting accurately during times of disaster.

Thinking Locally:

How can you help reporters learn more about emergency response operations in your area?
Do you have a plan for educating the public to enhance area emergency preparedness?

To submit a 'Smart Practice' for consideration or to subscribe to Smart Practices Spotlight send an e-mail to SmartPractices@fema.gov

Smart Practices Spotlight highlights practices and ideas that members of the emergency management and responder community have found useful and effective; they are not necessarily advocated or endorsed by FEMA. For more information about this initiative, contact David F. Byron, director, Volusia County Community Information Division, at dbyron@co.volusia.fl.us or (386) 822-5062.